

## Should I Return or Should I Go?<sup>1</sup>

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In *The Return* exhibition, the theme of “re-turn” occurs both in the exhibition’s format, and also in the works themselves, presenting the artists’ tendencies to re-turn to concepts across a diversity of materials and processes. Through installation, painting, printing, sculpture, and photography the artists explore issues of the familiar and the foreign, home and exile, and the act of belonging or returning to oneself.

To return or *the* return... The act of the return encompasses multiple elements: the decision to come or go back to a person, a place, or an activity. Or if returning something, it signifies the act of giving back whether one wants to or not. Furthermore, it can point to the ultimate desire to return or “nostalgia” coined by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688 to refer to the extreme homesickness that the Swiss soldiers in foreign European armies experienced.<sup>2</sup> Nostalgia comes from the Greek *nostos*, meaning “return home,” and *algia*, “pain” or “suffering.” Literally meaning homesickness, nostalgia is a “morbid longing to return to one’s home or native country.”<sup>3</sup> It is a yearning for the past stemming from separation in *and* of time.

Therefore, return embodies layers of (emotive) movements and the act of returning can be regarded as *palintropic*, or as that “which keeps turning,” or “turns back on itself;” a going back upon oneself, a sort of *renversement*.<sup>4</sup> Hence, whether through the sheer act of presenting the act of return, or enabling the material to speak *of* a return, *The Return* exhibition departs and arrives at a selection of artists that embody this act as well as the notion.

A return embodies different time frames: it can turn into a temporary condition or a lifelong status. Through these shifting positions, the notion of the return allows one to question fixed perceptions of the world. Moving between contexts and migrating between places and contexts can also be traced to the dissolution of home as an isolated geographical location: Where does one return? Where is home?

“Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition,” writes James Baldwin in *Giovanni’s Room* (1956).<sup>5</sup> The result is an increasingly nomadic relationship to home—an outlook that is vivid in the selected works. The multifaceted body of work on view

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<sup>1</sup> A tweak on the song *Should I Stay Or Should I Go* by The Clash released in 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Anouk Smeekes & Jolanda Jetten (2019), “Longing for one’s home country: National nostalgia and acculturation among immigrants and natives,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 69, 131-150.

<sup>3</sup> K. I. Batcho (2013), “Nostalgia: The bittersweet history of a psychological concept,” *History of Psychology* 16, 165–176.

<sup>4</sup> André Aciman, *False Papers* (New York: Picador, 2001), 139.

<sup>5</sup> James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room* (London: Penguin, 2001), 88.

plays on the tension between these states, as well as on their shifting boundaries and the attached materialities. Through the use of diverse materials and their combinations, an act is unveiled. The different contexts and focal points on view provide different ways to approach both the notion and the act of return; moreover, it enables us to *feel* the return.

Ranging from the perspective of the individual, from the very personal to the act of a legal return—stemming from the structural and institutional violence and the inherent exercise of power, these artistic expressions can be traced back to the universal issues of movement and mobility, since a return is fundamentally a movement.

Focusing on movement and transformation, **Ruth Biller** returns to the human body through the medium of painting. More than the figure, it is the gaze of the figure and the gaze of the viewer that keeps on returning. In this regard, she gives or returns time to the gaze. There is an inherent play at work through the different perspectives and the diverse viewing angles that unveil plays with space—those that one leaves or one that returns to. The separation and the reunion are hand in hand as she harkens the dynamics between departure and arrival as well as the real and the imagined.

Textiles have been enduring markers of belonging and identities. Because they transcend borders, because they are infinitely mobile, wearable, and displayable, their performative qualities enhance their multiplicity of meanings. **Sina Dyks** exploits this confluence, offering us alternative histories, geographies, cultural and artistic mappings stitched together. Dyks understands the capacity of materials to speak and as an artist who is fluent in the materiality of the textile; she puts current technical innovations vividly on view. Her tactile installation embodies both the notion and the act of the return as she recycles plastic into striking yarns that are transformed into her textile sculptures, or textiles in space. The materials used, as well as their dimensions are transformed both in space *and* through space. The plastic turns into yarn becoming an installation that embodies the friction of materials in transformation.

Following the same thread, as the cotton or the wool is transformed into the yarn which becomes textile, **Gaetano di Gregorio** focuses on the integral qualities of ceramics as the millennia-old material that is transformed through the acts of mixing, massaging, and aggregating. The ceramics return to a mineral state and in his artistic work metamorphoses from material to shapes, however, always remains true to its origins while uniting the architectural elements with classical forms. The material itself becomes the artwork as a result of this process that geographically combines eastern and western ceramic traditions while recurring in different forms throughout time. The malleable material of clay has been molded, imprinted, and cast—in short, it has been on a constant route to a return, to a transformation. Placed at the crossroads of an archeological find or belonging to the house of the future, di Gregorio's body of work stands firmly at the intersection of archeology, architecture, art, and design.

The figure returns in the work of **Boukje Janssen** to unleash the significances and senses in movements, positions, and gestures. Through a distinct sensibility and by using paper cut-outs, fabric, embroidery, and drawing she approaches the tactile nature of art as she uses to create an ambiance of figurative constellations that return to the form. The body, whether collectively or on its own, returns. The figure is the key in her work as she uses it both symbolically as well as concretely. Through the language of the figure, Janssen unveils the individual both alone and placed in a constellation. However, this position may not necessarily result in a cohesive unity... the threads that connect the figures may only remain on the surface.

**Ekin Su Koç** approaches return through a sense of belonging. With colorful pieces of textiles, she maps and materially constructs political and emotive spaces. Her art operates through them as well as results in them as she questions what borders have done to societies but also hints at what societies are doing to borders. She does not reject or erase her context of origin, but rather employs her feelings, experiences, and encounters as the sources through which to create both an individual as well as artistic means not only to engage viewers but also to challenge cartographic as well as identity categories. As she re-examines, reflects, narrates, and returns to multiple geographical imaginations, her work carries traces of diverse (material) cultures, codes, languages, traditions, challenges, and hopes.

Although ours is a time dominated by digital technologies and an obsession with “truth,” there is also a growing interest in the tactile and playful nature of (early) photography and printmaking. Ever since the invention of “photogenic drawing” by William Henry Fox Talbot in 1834, artist-photographers have worked without a camera, directly restoring or returning the traces of an object on photosensitive paper. Having worked with this return to the basic mode of photography for years **Brigitte Spiegel** takes it to a colorful new level in her latest body of work using the technique of Risograph. Created by Noboru Hayama in post-war Japan in 1946, the Risograph (and the development of soy-based ink) was a response to the expensive import of emulsion ink following the end of the war. He chose a poetic and fitting name to express how important it was for people to not lose their ideals during this period of despair. Imprinting this ideal directly into the company name Hayama founded “Riso” meaning “ideal.” Spiegel capitalizes on this “ideal” format as a source of productive imaginary concerned with image creation, its delicate appearance as well as its fragile future, through its layers depicted that essentially materialize our relation to time. She creates a different mode of fabricating images that oscillate and temporarily return to the alleged transparency of the photographic medium with its documentative qualities, especially the importance given to its clarity and readability. Through the medium of prints, Spiegel turns familiar places and spaces into unfamiliar or uncanny creations. Her works are positioned at the juncture where the spatial and temporal qualities (re)turn and are captured on the surface of the print which enables manifold layers that extend from the surface of the paper into time. She puts aside the high-tech possibilities in order to return and focus on each moment unveiling various stories: real and imagined.

All the artists in the exhibition, live and work across diverse locations, and return to different materials to express their curiosities, passion, ideas, and hopes. Poised between veracity and imagination, the present and the ephemeral, *The Return* embodies multiple returns: A return to basics, core materials, safety, home, past, or fantasy... As one arrives at the end of the exhibition, one inherently returns to the beginning, though, hopefully with a fresh and informed peek into the future. After all, to return is a response.

There is only one question left to ask: Should we stay, or should we go?